

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 301729

FOL TEL SENT ACTION BANGKOK INFO SECSTATE DEA HQS WASHDC
FROM RANGOON DTD 16 DEC 1977 QTE

C O N F I D E N T I A L RANGOON 3917

FROM AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SNAR, BM

SUBJ: NEWSPAPER ARTICLE ON DEA VISIT

1. DEFENSE SERVICES INTELLIGENCE FOREIGN LIAISON OFFICER TIN MAUNG CALLED IN THE EVENING TO INFORM US THAT BANGKOK POST DECEMBER 15 EDITION CONTAINS A STORY ON DEA'S RECENT VISIT TO RANGOON. WE NOTE THAT THE ARTICLE STATES THAT "A U.S. EMBASSY NARCOTICS OFFICER FLEW TO RANGOON YESTERDAY TO PERSUADE THE BURMESE GOVERNMENT TO LAUNCH A SUPPRESSION CAMPAIGN....." AND QUOTES A "RELIABLE SOURCE". AT THE TIME OF HIS PHONE CALL, TIN MAUNG SAID THAT HE HAD NOT YET INFORMED HIS SUPERIORS BUT WOULD HAVE TO DO SO AND COULD NOT PREDICT THEIR REACTION. FROM HIS OWN CONCERN, ONE CAN CONFIDENTLY PREDICE THAT THEIR REACTION WILL BE HIGHLY UNFAVORABLE.

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2. AS DEPARTMENT AND EMBASSY BANGKOK ARE AWARE, A PREVIOUS INCIDENT OF A BANGKOK PRESS ARTICLE ON THE TACHILEK SEIZURE CAUSED US GREAT DIFFICULTY WITH THE GUB. AT THAT TIME THERE WAS SOME DISCUSSION WITHIN GUB NARCOTICS CIRCLES AS TO THE DESIRABILITY OF A CONTINUED RELATIONSHIP WITH THIS EMBASSY ON NARCOTICS MATTERS AS INTIMATE AS HAD BEEN THE CASE. WE WERE ABLE TO RIDE OUT THAT STORM BECAUSE OF THE RELATIONSHIP OF

TRUST AND CONFIDENTIALITY WHICH HAS BEEN DEVELOPED OVER THE PAST YEAR. I HOPE THAT THAT RELATIONSHIP IS SUFFICIENTLY STRONG TO RIDE OUT THE STORM WHICH I FEAR WILL RESULT FROM THIS SECOND INCIDENT. WE ARE ALL PAINFULLY AWARE OF EXTREME BURMESE SENSITIVITIES. WHETHER OR NOT THOSE SENSITIVITIES ARE RATIONAL IS NOT THE POINT, BUT THE FACT IS THAT THEY DO EXIST. CONTINUED IRRITANTS OF THIS NATURE WILL INEVITABLY POSE A SERIOUS THREAT TO THE CONTINUED EFFECTIVENESS OF OUR PROGRAM IN BURMA. THEY ALSO LESSEN THE CHANCES OF EVENTUAL THAI/BURMA COOPERATION AND PUT A DECIDED CHILL ON THE WARMTH AND CORDIALITY OF THE DEA VISIT WHICH ENDED ONE DAY BEFORE APPEARANCE OF THE ARTICLE.

3. IN VIEW OF STANDING INSTRUCTIONS ON DISCUSSIONS WITH THE PRESS ON NARCOTICS, I AM RELUCTANT TO CONCLUDE THAT THE ARTICLE WAS THE RESULT OF AN INDISCRETION ON THE PART OF AN AMERICAN OFFICER AND I WOULD LIKE TO ASSURE THE BURMESE OF THAT. I AM AWARE THAT A THAI REPORTER MIGHT SIMPLY HAVE NOTICED THE RECENT FLIGHT TO RANGOON OF DEA OFFICERS AND EXTRAPOLATED THIS STORY FROM THAT. IF THAT IS THE CASE, IT WOULD INDICATE THAT THE VISIBILITY IN BANGKOK OF SENIOR DEA OFFICIALS DOES NOT PERMIT THEM TO VISIT RANGOON UNOBSERVED. IN THAT CASE I WOULD SUGGEST THAT WE CONSIDER HAVING LOWER LEVEL AND LESSER KNOWN OFFICIALS MAKE THESE VISITS.

4. I WOULD GREATLY APPRECIATE ANY INFORMATION WHICH EMBASSY BANGKOK CAN PROVIDE ON THIS MATTER WHICH MIGHT HELP RELIEVE

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THE CURRENT DIFFICULTY, AS WELL AS ANY SUGGESTED ACTIONS WHICH MIGHT GUARANTEE THAT THERE WILL BE NO REPETITION OF SUCH PRESS ARTICLES. INASMUCH AS I AM NOW INVOLVED IN A SERIES OF CALLS ON GUB CABINET MEMBERS, THIS INCIDENT IS PARTICULARLY AWKWARD AND DAMAGING. THEREFORE, I WOULD APPRECIATE AS RAPID A RESPONSE AS POSSIBLE SO THAT I MIGHT BE SUITABLY ARMED DURING MY FORTHCOMING CALLS AND SO THAT WE MAY MAKE SUITABLE APOLOGIES AND EXPLANATIONS TO COL. MYO AUNG AND HIS COLLEAGUES AT DEFENSE SERVICES INTELLIGENCE AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE. IT WOULD ALSO BE EXTREMELY DESIRABLE TO PUT THIS MATTER TO REST, IF THAT IS POSSIBLE, BEFORE THE PROSPECTIVE VISIT TO RANGOON OF DR. BOURNE AND MS FALCO.

5. AT THE RISK OF REPETITION, I MUST STRESS THE WELL-KNOWN PECULIAR ATMOSPHERE IN WHICH WE WORK IN RANGOON. THE BURMESE ARE AT LEAST AS SENSITIVE IN MATTERS LIKE THIS AS ANY PEOPLE I HAVE EVER KNOWN. OUR NARCOTICS PROGRAM HERE, DESPITE THE MUTUALITY OF U.S. AND GUB INTERESTS, CAN BE SERIOUSLY THREATENED BY INDISCRETIONS OR EVEN BY INADVERTENT EXPOSURE OF OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE GUB. US/GUB RELATIONS IN NARCOTICS SUPPRESSION MUST REMAIN AT LEAST SEMI-COVERT FOR BURMESE POLITICAL REASONS. IT IS PRIMARILY THEIR SHOW AND

WE MUST PLAY IT THAT WAY IF WE WANT TO PLAY AT ALL. BEAN
UNQET VANCE

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Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
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